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ABSTRACT

Reform Judaism, the branch of Judaism most liberal in religious practice and most committed to adapting to the realities of modern America, has recently abandoned its opposition to Jewish day schools and has thereby signalled its acceptance of an alternative to public education. When the ancestors of these Reform Jews came to America in the middle of the nineteenth century, they were anxious to become part of American economic and social life. While ripe for acceptance of the public schools, many Jews initially rejected them and opted for either private Jewish schools or nonsectarian academies. But by 1870 changes in the public schools and among the Jews themselves, led to a solid consensus favoring public education. That consensus remained unchallenged until the 1960s which culminated in the establishment of the first two modern Reform day schools in 1970. This paper explores the events surrounding establishment of the unequivocal public school consensus among Reform Jews in the 1870s and its erosion beginning in the 1960s. Particular emphasis is placed on explanations focusing on religious influence in the public schools, issues of quality secular and Jewish education, and Jewish perceptions of how to fulfill Judaism's commitment to social justice. (Author)

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A CENTURY LATER AND WORLDS APART: AMERICAN REFORM JEWS AND THE PUBLIC SCHOOL-PRIVATE SCHOOL DILEMMA, 1870, 1970

BY

MICHAEL ZELDIN

JUNE 1986

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Michael Zeldin

Hebrew Union College, Los Angeles

Abstract

Reform Judaism, the branch of Judaism most liberal in religious practice and most committed to adapting to the realities of modern America, has recently abandoned its opposition to Jewish day schools and has thereby signalled its acceptance of an alternative to public education. When the ancestors of these Reform Jews came to America in the middle of the nineteenth century, they were anxious to become part f American economic and social life. While ripe for acceptance of the public schools, many Jews initially rejected them and opted for either private Jewish schools or nonsectarian academies. But by 1870, changes in the public schools and among the Jews themselves, led to a solid consensus favoring public education.

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A CENTURY LATER AND WORLDS APART: AMERICAN REFORM JEWS AND THE PUBLIC SCHOOL-PRIVATE SCHOOL DILEMMA, 1870, 1970

Michael Zeldin

Hebrew Union College, Los Angeles

It was a historic moment early the morning of November 3, 1985, when the chair moved to bring the issue of full-time education to a vote of the 2000 delegates representing Reform Jewish congregations across North America.[1] The voice vote was inconclusive, but the standing vote clearly indicated that Reform Judaism, the branch of American Judaism most liberal in religious practice and most committed to adapting to the realities of modern America, was ready to abandon its opposition to Jewish day schools and to signal its acceptance of an alternative to public education.

Thus it was that Reform Judaism joined a growing movement in American society toward private schooling. Until the 1960s, private schooling was predominantly centered in the Northeastern states and was overwhelmingly centered in Catholic parochial schools[2]. Traditionally, about 10% of American school children have received their education in private schools, but over the last quarter century, and particularly during the last decade, there has been a perceptible increase in the acceptance of private schooling across sectors of American society. As of 1982, the percentage of children enrolled in private schools had crept up to 12.5%, with projections of a rather

steep increase to 15% before the end of the decade[3]. This fact alone would signal a significant increase in the acceptance of private schooling, but the trend appears even more significant when coupled with the precipitous decline in Catholic school enrollment and the opening of vast numbers of new private schools in the sun belt. The cumulative result is that private schooling is a more diversified phenomenon in the United States now than at any time since the advent of the common schools in the middle of the 19th century. Private schools are now scattered across the continent and across the ideological and religious spectrum[4].

Reform Judaism's decision to give formal approval to yet another type of private school thus takes on added significance in the context of the public school-private school debate raging in America. Families which once would have hardly considered any alternative to the local public schools now routinely face the dilemma of whether public school or any one of a number of types of private schools is most appropriate for their children. Churches and synagogues which once would not have even thought about opening private schools now frequently must decide whether or not to sponsor full-day schools. Local governments debate the appropriate role of local private schools; states face the issue of whether and how to include private schools in public financing schemes; and the federal government flirts with proposals for tuition tax credits and vouchers plans designed to treat private schools on a par with public schools. Through its decision to approve private Reform Jewish schools, Reform Judaism has entered the fray at its most heated moment in recent history.

The groundwork for Reform Judaism's new stance in the private school-public school debate was laid long before the day school

resolution reached the convention floor in 1985. A decade and a half earlier, in 1970, the first two Reform Jewish day schools opened their doors. The opening of these two schools marked the end of Reform Judaism's nearly unanimous public school consensus. This historic policy reversal is one focus of this paper.

The other focus is the original development of that consensus a century earlier. Prior to 1870, Jewish communities in cities large and small across America had conducted private Jewish schools to educate their children both for the conditions of American life and for the continuation of Jewish tradition. Some Jewish parents sent their children to these and other private schools, while others enrolled their offspring in common schools. But by 1870, a firm consensus favoring common schools had emerged among American Jews. Once having decided in favor of common schools, Reform Jews became among their most ardent supporters.

In their changing attitudes towards public education - first the full acceptance of public schooling in the 19th century followed by a century of unequivocal support, and later the erosion of the public school consensus - Reform Jews are representative of other ethnic and religious groups in America. The public schools became the nearly universal force that they were only because so many segments of American society chose to support them. They served both as a means of socializing the children of newcomers to American society and as an avenue to upward mobility. For more than a century the public schools represented the freedom, equality and promise that America symbolized to native and immigrant groups alike. Only by the recent erosion of public school support among subgroup after subgroup are private schools establishing themselves as such a significant force in

contemporary America. Before examining in detail the events and issues within the Reform Jewish community surrounding the years 1870 and 1970, we turn to a brief review of the development of Reform Judaism in America.

Reform Judaism in America

The first community of twenty-three Jews arrived in North America in 1654 and were followed over the next century and a half by several thousand of their coreligionists, most of them following Sephardic Jewish customs established in Spain and Portugal several centuries earlier. Throughout the colonial and early national period, Jews hired tutors to educate their children, establishing only one formal school during this period.[5] Several Jewish schools opened and closed during the early part of the 19th century, mostly in New York; all followed the Sephardic customs.

During these years Jewish immigrants began to arrive from Germany. At first, the German Jews who came to America migrated from rural areas untouched by the Enlightenment sweeping across Europe. Few in number, they brought with them traditional Jewish customs quite dissimilar from the Sephardic customs of the earlier Jewish settlers. The most sizable influx of German Jewish immigrants, which occurred when the aborted revolution of 1848 failed to bring about hoped-for liberal reforms in Germany, resulted in an almost tenfold increase in the Jewish population of the United States. Like the earlier immigrants from Germany, these Jews were uncomfortable with the Sephardic customs of the established Jewish congregations in America. But unlike the earlier immigrants, the mass of German Jewish

immigrants came from major cities where in many cases they had been profoundly influenced by the European intellectual Enlightenment and the early moves toward the Reform of Jewish practice. The new immigrants brought with them a world-view colored by the intellectual life of Germany. Only too willing to accept their new political status as Americans, they also clung tenaciously to their German Jewish heritage. As one leading rabbi of the day explained,

> Racially I am a Jew, for I have been born among the Jewish nation. Politically I am an American as patriotic , as enthusiastic, as devoted an American citizen as it is possible to be. But spiritually I am a German, for my inner life has been profoundly influenced by Schiller, Goethe, Kant and other intellectual giants of Germany.[6]

Economic issues dominated the lives of most German Jews who came to America. They fanned out across the Eastern seaboard, the growing urban centers of the Midwest, and the pioneering towns of the South and West. Everywhere they settled, they sought acceptance as they strove to earn their livelihood, often peddling merchandise and setting up stores and shops.

For many, the desire to accommodate to America was foremost. If they were unable to get Kosher meat, then they would give up the Jewish dietary laws. If they were unable to find the ten men needed for Jewish worship, they would not pray. And if they found it an economic hardship to close their businesses on Saturdays, then they would no longer observe the Sabbath.

Wherever German Jews settled in sufficient numbers, they would establish congregations. Many of them insisted that their congregations fit their enlightened view of Judaism. They thus sought to establish what the leading rabbi of the era, Isaac M. Wise, called Minhag America, A Custom for America. They sought ways to accommodate

Judaism to modernity. In the area of ritual practice, this meant introducing a decorum and an aesthetic not found in traditional congregations. The rabbis preached in the language of the people (at first German and later English), choral readings and hymns sung to German tunes replaced individually-paced prayer, women sat alongside men rather than in a separate section, and organ music was introduced. Whenever a congregation's financial situation allowed, elaborate domed edifices were constructed.

As important as were the changes in practice, they were overshadowed by the changes in the belief structure of Jews striving to accommodate to America. Since Jews sought to see themselves as American in every way, they negated traditional notions of Jewish peoplehood. They preferred to view Judaism as a religion only, not a national entity. Since they accepted reason and logic as the basis of faith, they negated traditional Jewish views of resurrection of the dead and the idea of a personal Messiah. Instead, they developed a vision of a "Messianic Age," a utopian era of peace and brotherhood in line with the optimism of the Enlightenment. The universalist tone of this Messianic vision was consistent with Reform Jews' desire to see themselves as part of the general society. The special mission of Jews, though, was to be a "light unto the nations," a force for morality, for ethical behavior, and most importantly for social justice. These reforms of practice and belief were accepted by many, but not all, American Jews. However, the founding of a network of national institutions in the 1870s helped establish a basis for modernist Judaism which ultimately strengthened the position of Reform Judaism in American Jewish life.

Many of the customs and beliefs established among the first

generation continued to characterize Reform Judaism for most of the next 100 years, and the major thrust of Reform Judaism remained unchanged: the accommodation of Judaism to the realities of American life and culture, and the centrality of social justice as the primary Jewish responsibility. Some significant Reforms did take place, most notably the reversal on the issue of Jewish peoplehood. While maintaining Reform Judaism's basic conception of Judaism as a religion rather than a nationality, Reform came to accept the central role Israel plays in Jewish life.

By the mid-twentieth century, then, the character of Reform Judaism had been well established. Following World War II, Reform Judaism entered an era of unprecedented growth. The move of Jews to the suburbs was accompanied by the establishment of congregations everywhere. Reform Judaism's American nature was well-suited to the new suburbanites, making minimal demands on their time, presenting them with forms of religious practice congruent with American culture, and advocating a value structure of universal ethics compatible with mainstream American values.

In response to the Six-Day War of 1967 and influenced by the ethnic movements of America, American Jews including Reform Jews experienced an upsurge in ethnic identity and pride. For third- and fourth-generation Americans, the issue of becoming Americanized was moot. Firmly rooted in their identity as Americans, many began to seek their ethnic roots in their Jewish heritage. Reform Judaism responded by reintroducing some of the customs which had been rejected by earlier generations. While seeking a deeper sense of rooting in Judaism, Reform Jews maintained as strongly as ever their commitment to the values of social justice. Through the civil rights and

anti-war movements of the 60s and early 70s, through the human rights concerns (particularly for Soviet Jews) of the 70s, through the anti-nuclear movement and concerns for the hungry and homeless of the 80s, Reform has been in the forefront of Jewish activism on behalf of Jews in distress and all human beings in need.

For more than a century, then, Reform Judaism has represented accommodation to America coupled with a commitment to Jewish survival and a devotion to values of universal social justice. As the most liberal wing of the organized Jewish community, Reform has always been part of the mainstream of American life, willing to adjust to changes on the American scene. The establishment of a public school consensus around 1870 and its erosion around 1970 must thus be seen in the context of these realities.

1870: Building Consensus for the Public Schools

> It is our settled opinion here that the education of the young is the business of the State, and the religious instruction, to which we add the Hebrew, is the duty of religious bodies. Neither ought to interfere with the other. The secular branches belong to the public schools, religion in the Sabbath schools, exclusively.[7]

When Isaac M. Wise, the leading 19th century American rabbi, wrote these words to the United States Commissioner of Education in 1870, American Jewry was virtually unanimous in its support of the public schools. But just as the acceptance of public schooling was achieved gradually in other segments of American society, the Jewish consensus emerged slowly over a period of decades.

To German Jews who immigrated in the 1840s and 1850s, America offered an opportunity unique in history. Accustomed to persecution in Europe, they saw in America the hope of achieving equality and the possibility of being fully accepted by their neighbors. Max

Lilienthal, a leading German Jewish educator and rabbi, arrived in America in 1845 and immediately wrote back to friends in Europe:

> Oh, it is necessary that you breathe this free air of Columbia in order that you may be able to understand the pride and joy of her children; you must have shaken off the centuried dust of the old Jewish oppression in order to appreciate to the full the feeling, 'I am a man like every other'; you must see here our Jewish brethren, the persecuted emigrants of persecuting Europe, in order to become convinced how worthily the Jew cooperates with his Christian brethren here . . .[8]

He was later to describe the American Jew as "In creed a monotheist, in descent a Hebrew, Israelite or Jew, in all other public or private relations, an American Citizen."[9] And in a Thanksgiving sermon, he went so far as to place his Americanism above his identity as a Jew:

> Let us, then, be proud of our country, our flag, our institutions and our name. Let us give sincere thanks that we all, native and adopted citizens, can join in one grand chorus of praise and exultation. Let us promise to-day, first and above all, we will be and remain Americans in sentiment, word and deed! First Americans and then Jews, Catholics, Protestants or members of whatever denomination any man may choose, according to the dictates of his conscience![10]

Lilienthal was not alone in his commitment to America. Wise also saw America as distinctly different from other countries in which Jews had settled, and the necessity for a new set of Jewish customs (his Minhag America) was based largely on his realization that America was indeed unique for the Jews. These American sentiments made the Jewish immigrants ripe for the common schools.

It is interesting to note how different this Jewish position is from the attitude of the Catholic community of the day.[11] Among Catholics, forces for parochial schooling began to develop in the late 18th century and continued to gather strength throughout the 19th century. The congruence of many factors led to an official Catholic consensus on the need for parochial schools, but the importance of one

factor cannot be underestimated. As one historian put it, "For the Catholic Church in America no . . . easy solution to the problems of education was available. By the middle decades of the nineteenth century, its leaders were so alienated from much of American life that they regarded public education with deep suspicion, and began to cast around for alternatives."(emphasis added)[12]

In direct contrast, the prevalent Jewish view that America offered Jews the opportunity for the full participation in society led many to advocate the public schools. One of the leading public school spokesman pleaded with his fellow Jews:

> Support as much as you can the public school system, and lend no help whatever to sectarian institutions: do not send your children , neither your sons nor your daughters, to such, and don't complain about heavy school taxes; - establish no Jewish school except the only one branch [sic] of your religion, history and Hebrew language.[13]

A conference of rabbis, gathered in Cleveland in 1870, explicitly connected their commitment to America to their support of public schools:

> We love and revere this country as our home and fatherland for us and our children; and therefore consider it our paramount duty to sustain and support the government; to favor by all means the system of free education, leaving religious instruction to the care of the different denominations.[14]

That Jewish patriotism should have resulted in Jewish support for the public schools can be attributed to two distinct lines of reasoning. First, if Jews were to be full partners in American life, they had to join in supporting American institutions. Support for the public schools was thus seen as an obligation Jews had as Americans. Jews should support the public schools, journalist Isidore Bush argued, "because, as good republicans we ought to be in favor of public schools, and opposed to sectarian or church-schools of whatever

denomination."[15]

Second, the public schools were seen as the most advantageous way of eliminating prejudice. Part of the Jewish vision of America as a uniquely suitable place for Jews to live was the wholehearted belief that anti-Semitism could be erased in a free society with no history of intolerance. Wise expressed his hope that "our schools should be gathering places of republican youth, where, by the restricted nature of the studies, the last echoes of prejudice and superstition should expire."[16] Bush extended this argument in two somewhat contradictory ways. On the one hand he argued that sending Jewish children to schools attended exclusively by Jews would both impede their integration into American life and would segregate them from their non-Jewish peers. Such segregation would deprive non-Jews of the opportunity to mingle with Jews and would lead to the intolerance that results from ignorance. He argued,

> Should our children be educated as Jews only or even as foreigners in language and spirit, or shall they be educated as Americans, as citizens of the same free country, to be with them one harmonious people; or should we ourselves foster that unfortunate prejudice that pressed so many bitter, burning tears from most of us, and from our fathers in the old country? Answer yourselves which system will do the one and which must result in the other.[17]

On the other hand, he seemed to contradict his basic line of reasoning when, a year later, he argued that Jewish children needed to attend public schools so that they could come in direct contact with anti-Semitism and learn how do deal with it effectively.

> Let me ask you, which class of our children are in a better condition to meet and overcome the spectre of Intolerance: those whom we have thus excluded from all intercourse with the children of others [by sending them to Jewish schools], who, when they leave the Jewish school are wholly unprepared to meet "the spectre," or those who already learnt to know it, and under our guidance have been taught how to repel such indignity in this country of civil and religious freedom?[18]

Whether arguing that anti-Semitism was inevitable or that it could be overcome, Bush was consistent in advocating that Jewish children needed to come in contact with non-Jews at an early age and that the common school was the best meeting ground. This view was reiterated in a rabbinic debate on education in 1855 when one of the rabbis concluded that "it was in the interest of the rising generation to become thoroughly acquainted with their fellow citizens."[19]

Given the Jewish sentiments on America and the public schools' role in it, it is somewhat surprising that the public school consensus among Jews was three decades in the making. When German Jews first began arriving in America in large numbers in the 1840s, they established private Jewish day schools in nearly every city in which they settled. Not only were congregational day schools set up in larger areas of settlement like New York, Chicago and Cincinnati, but they were also established in eighteen other communities including small cities like Easton, Pennsylvania and Shreveport, Louisiana. Jewish parents also frequently sent their children to private schools, some under Jewish auspices, others not.[20]

While support for private schooling never represented the majority opinion within the Jewish community, Jewish day schools operated continuously from 1842 until the last school closed its doors in 1872. In the heyday of Jewish day schools in the early 1850s, the Jewish community was severely split over the public school-private school issue. The combined enrollment in New York City's seven Jewish day schools reached a maximum of 754 in 1854. In Cincinnati, the Jewish day school enrolled 150 of the 500 Jewish students in the city.[21] If the Jewish attitude toward America made the Jewish

community so ripe for acceptance of the public schools, what factors inhibited the emergence of a public school consensus earlier? First, the early common schools were strongly influenced by Protestant religious sentiment. Second, the schools were at first impervious to demands by immigrant groups that the public schools help preserve the immigrants' native tongues. And third, the quality of education available in the early common schools did not inspire the confidence of Jewish parents. Only the confluence of several changes, both in the public schools and among the Jews themselves, allowed the public school consensus to solidify in the years leading up to 1870.

The question of religion in the schools. In his landmark article, "Temples of Liberty Unpolluted: American Jews and Public Schools, 1840-1875,"[22] Lloyd Gartner argues that Jews accepted the public schools when sectarian influences were removed. Yet he readily acknowledges that while total non-sectarianism may have been the goal - not only of Jews but of others as well - religious influences were not entirely eliminated from American public schools during the 19th century. Bible readings, for example, persisted well into the 20th century. Therefore, it is necessary to look beyond the secularization of the schools in order to understand why Jewish acceptance of the public schools became universal.

One of the rationales for public education given by the common school crusaders was the need for moral education among youth. To them moral education meant Christian moral education. As early as 1843, Jewish leaders recognized that the experiences children had in the Christian environment of the public schools could be problematic for Jewish children. Isaac Leeser, publisher of one of the leading Jewish newspapers of the day and a key figure in the opposition to

religious Reform in Judaism warned against sending children to

> a public or private school which is essentially Christian; they hear prayers recited in which the name of a mediator is invoked; they hear a book read as an authority equal if not superior to the received word of God; . . . Beside all this, we are in great error if we suppose that Christian teachers do not endeavor to influence actively the sentiments of their Jewish pupils; there are some, at least, who take especial pains to warp the mind and to implant the peculiar tenets of Christianity clandestinely.[23]

Leeser clung to his opposition to placing Jewish children in an educational setting in which they would be exposed to religious exercises. "It was shown by experience," he wrote,

> to be an impossibility for children to be present at the reading of prayers or during the recital of the religious catechism, without their being infected by the doctrine inculcated or rendered callous to the effects of future religious training, by their having acquired an irrepressible habit of scoffing at foreign doctrines.[24]

However, even when Jewish children would not be exposed to Christianity explicitly, schools would inescapably influence Jewish children towards Christian beliefs. Samuel Isaacs, a New York rabbi, advocated parochial schools despite the <u>apparent</u> neutrality of the public schools in matters of religion. He argued that

> there exists so much liberality in the public school system, that no child, contrary to the wishes of its parents, is forced to recite from the New Testament; but you will agree with me, that our children, in particular those of a very tender age, imbibe a considerable portion of the tenets of the Christian faith.[25]

One particularly troublesome problem for the Jewish community was the use of textbooks strongly influenced by Protestant doctrine. In New York in 1843, a group of Jewish parents objected to the School Board about the use of "American Popular Lessons," a textbook used in virtually every school in the city. The committee appointed to study the complaints concluded that it was

> unable to discover any possible ground of objection even by the Jews, except what may arise from the fact that they are chiefly

> derived from the New Testament, and inculcate the general principles of Christianity. . . .
> If, then, the Jews, on coming into a Christian country, find institutions at variance with, or opposed to their own peculiar views, your committee do not perceive that they have any just ground of complaint, or that they can reasonably ask that such institutions be changed for their convenience.[26]

The extent to which Jews were offended by this ruling cannot be gauged directly, but several Jewish day schools opened in the years immediately following this incident.[27]

Subsequent changes in the public schools' selection of textbooks may have been a factor in the demise of these very same schools a decade later. After a decentralized system of school governance was introduced into New York's schools, local wards were gradually given additional powers. During 1855-56, the local wards were given control over two key decisions. First, the decision of whether or not to read from Scripture was left to the discretion of each local ward, and second, each ward was permitted to select texts for its schools from among those approved by the central board. The result of these moves was that wards with large Jewish constituencies were able to outlaw Bible readings and to eliminate overtly sectarian textbooks. Within a year, all of the Jewish day schools in the city closed.[28]

The issue of Bible readings seems to have garnered a great deal of attention among 19th century Jews. In Cincinnati, where both Isaac M. Wise and Max Lilienthal served as rabbis, the school board abolished Bible readings in 1869:

> Resolved , that religious instruction and the reading of religious books, including the Holy Bible, are prohibited in the common schools of Cincinnati, it being the object and true interest of this rule, to allow the children of the parents of all sects and opinions, in matter of faith and worship, to enjoy alike the benefit of the common school fund.[29]

Rather than precluding controversy, the passage of this resolution

heightened tensions in the community. The school board's move faced several legal challenges. The Superior Court of Cincinnati ruled against the school board and concluded "that the Bible must be retained in the public schools of Ohio, the pupils must sing hymns, provided the parents take no exception, and the performance is no Protestant worship."[30] While this ruling was eventually overturned by the Ohio State Supreme Court, the extended controversy gave the two Cincinnati rabbis, Wise and Lilienthal, ample opportunity to state their views.

Wise argued that the schools should be totally secular and divorced from religion.

> We are opposed to Bible reading in the schools. The Public schools are institutions for the education of free, intelligent, and enlightened citizens...To this end we need good secular schools and nothing else. The state has no religion. Having no religion, it cannot impose any religious instruction on the citizen, adult or child. The Bible is a book of religion. All admit this. By what right is it imposed on the public schools.[31]

What is remarkable about this position is how different it is from the position enunciated by publisher Isaac Leeser a few years earlier. While it is true that Leeser and Wise were on opposite ends of the ideological spectrum on issues of Reform, both were early advocates of day schools. Leeser was convinced that education at its core must be religious. Echoing the sentiments of the common school crusaders, he called for a "Universal religion and not a particular religion"[32] in the common schools. Wise, however, saw things differently. For him, the common school had to be totally divorced from religion.

What Wise saw as desirable, Catholic leaders of his day saw as dangerous. This may in part account for the vastly different reactions of Jews and Catholics to public education. While Catholics

certainly favored the removal of Protestant sectarianism from the schools, they were afraid of the removal of all religious influences from the schools. "The public schools appeared to them," historian Cross remarks, "as simply an aggression of the world against the faith; that these schools were steadily growing less Protestant they took as a sign of a trend toward 'godlessness.'"[33] Lilienthal, representing the emerging Jewish position in favor of secularism, wanted to remove all sectarian influences from the schools and to introduce an Americanism divorced from religion:

> The Catholics denounce the public schools as godless and the hotbed of every vice and apply every opprobrious epithet to them. They demand a division of the school fund. What is to be done? Sectarianism must be removed from the schools, in order that there may be no just ground left for this demand. But look to the Protestant side. The Protestants come now and say defiantly that this is a Protestant country. When I left Europe I came to this country because I believed it to be free, the God-blessed country of all the world.
>
> On one side of this controversy are the Protestants, and on the other are the Catholics. Where in heaven's name are the Americans? . . .[34]

Substantive changes in the public schools were thus matched by equally substantive changes in the thinking of American Jews. Bible readings and religious exercises were often eliminated from the public schools, and textbooks characterized by overt sectarianism were gradually removed from usage, but at the same time Jewish sensibilities were evolving. First, the notion that the common schools might advocate a "universal religion" was replaced by an ideology that called on the schools to remain totally secular. The notion of Separation of Church and State was interpreted to mean that the instruments of the State should do more than be neutral in the competition among religions; the State should stay out of the religious field entirely. This made the targets of Jewish concern in

the schools much clearer. The notion of a "universal religion" was too open to interpretation; one person's universalism was the next person's sectarianism. By opposing all religious teachings in the schools, Jews were able to draw the lines clearly.

A second equally significant trend can be noted in the remarks of Wise and Lilienthal. Their arguments against Bible readings were scarcely based on Jewish grounds (as contrasted with the New York textbook battle 25 years earlier). They opposed Bible readings because Bible readings were bad for America . Lilienthal proposed a comprehensive platform for secularizing the schools during the Bible reading controversy in Cincinnati.

> 1. Bible or no Bible, our children will visit public schools. Our Sabbath schools and synagogues give us ample room and time to impart to them the required religious instruction.
> 2. No division of the school fund, no matter under what pretext it may be demanded.
> 3. Not a single penny out of the public funds for the support of any sectarian institution, be it for charitable or educational purposes.
> 4. No union of State and Church under any shape and form whatsoever.[35]

His conclusion explains the rationale for his views: "These principles will save the Union and restore the denominational peace we have heretofore enjoyed and which we hope will be continued for ever more on the virgin soil of American happiness and liberty."[36] It thus appears that Lilienthal favored the total secularization of the schools and the school fund at least in part because he believed that secularization was good for America. His pro-America stance was so strong that even if vestiges of religious teachings were to remain in the public schools, he would still support them. It is the evolution of Jewish thinking along the lines of Lilienthal's that allowed the Jewish consensus on public schools to emerge even though the public

schools were never fully cleansed of Protestant influence.

The question of German. Like other immigrants from Germany, Jews were deeply committed to German culture and language. Many immigrants continued to see themselves as intellectual heirs of German intellectualism even though they had chosen to live in America. For them, German was intrinsically connected to the ongoing struggle they had witnessed in Central Europe for emancipation and modernization. The immigrant generation thus maintained its commitment to German culture and sought schools in which its children could continue the tradition. As historian Isaac Fein explained,

> English was needed because one lived in America; German was the "native" tongue. German meant roots. German to the German Jew meant to be Jewish, to be of the Jewish group. . . . In addition, Jews at that time constituted a colony within the larger German colony, and German was all-important in their daily lives, in their intercourse with their non-Jewish German neighbors, with whom their relationship on the whole was friendly.[37]

Other groups of German immigrants maintained a similar allegiance to German, though for reasons of their own. For Catholics, for example, German symbolized their resistance to Protestant culture. A Catholic layperson of the day explained that

> Our German language . . . is the tie that holds us together, and it presents our duties to our country, and even to our God and Church, more forcibly to our souls than any other language. . . . For it and for the preservation of our German parishes and parish schools we stake our best powers. Upon these two rest our steadfastness in the faith and our loyalty to religion and the Church.[38]

Like other German immigrants, German Jews sought out schools in which their children could learn German. Of seventeen 19th century Jewish day schools whose curricula have been at least partially preserved, every one included German![39] Isaac Leeser, following a tour of several of these private Jewish schools discovered one that did not teach German. "It is intended," he noted, "to extend the

number of languages there taught by including that of German; a desideratum in the present time ."(emphasis added)[40] In cases where Jewish parents sent their children to other private schools, they frequently sent them to German schools that bore names like The German-English Academy.[41]

The pressure on the common schools to accommodate the needs and priorities of immigrants became enormous during the 1850s and 1860s. In cities with sizable numbers of German immigrants, Jews among them, moves were taken to include German in the common school curriculum. In Cincinnati, the move to introduce German into public schools had begun in 1840, and by 1853 legislation was passed to allow children whose local schools did not teach German to transfer to schools which did teach German.[42] In Milwaukee, students whose parents wished them to study German studied each day under special German tutors hired by the public schools.[43] And in Baltimore, the sizable German-speaking community pressured the school board to introduce German in schools of predominantly German neighborhoods.[44]

At the same time as the schools were taking moves to meet the German language priorities of many Jews, the Jews themselves were moving away from German. Wise and Leeser, who disagreed on many Jewish issues, agreed on the necessity of replacing German with English as the main language (alongside Hebrew) of American Judaism. Though Wise published the first edition of his prayerbook in Hebrew, English and German, he thought that including German was an undesirable but necessary compromise. In 1869, he advocated moving young people away from German as the best route to the advancement and Americanization of the Jewish community which he so desperately sought:

> It is a regrettable evil that many children of German parents speak a poor English, so that they are at once recognized as foreigners by the choice and pronunciation of English words as well as by the employment of special phrases and locutions. This is the case not only with the children of uneducated parents, but, above all, with those of educated parents, who are admonished in the parental home to speak a good German and to study German grammar...According to our view, the youth should be sent only to the state public school so that they should learn to speak the language of the country correctly and be sure to escape the danger of jargon.[45]

Though many of his rabbinic colleagues continued to disagree with Wise, it is clear that he was expressing the views of much of the Jewish populace. As school age children moved further and further away from the immigrant experience, they moved further from German culture as well. The move to adapt Judaism to America which lay at the core of Reform was paralleled by the move of Jews themselves to adapt to their new land. That move included adapting to a new language and adopting it as their vernacular.

The confluence of public school curriculum change and new ways of thinking about language among Jews thus seems to have contributed to Jewish acceptance of the public schools. On the one hand, once the schools were willing to incorporate German into their curriculum, Jews felt as if they had a place there. But at the same time, Jews were increasingly rejecting German in favor of English, and even the public schools which introduced German retained English as the primary language of instruction. The result of both trends was thus the same: Whether individual Jews sought to retain German or reject it, they found the public schools hospitable. Jewish children soon came to see English language (and American culture) as their own. Wise and others could be content that the schools played their part in Americanizing the Jews and preparing them for life in their new homeland.

<u>The question of educational quality.</u> On the issues of

secularization of the schools and the priority assigned to the German language, the schools changed to become more accommodating to the Jews and simultaneously the Jewish view changed to accommodate new views of America. On the issue of educational quality, the Jewish view remained unequivocal. Throughout this period, a major concern of Jewish leaders and Jewish parents was the quality of education their children would receive. When the perceived quality of public education was low and that of Jewish day schools high, parents sent their children to Jewish day schools; when parents felt that public schools provided superior education, they sent their children there. In large part the public debates over the efficacy of Jewish day schools rested on the then-current assessment of the comparative quality of the two types of schools.

Historian Hyman Grinstein attributes the rise and fall of Jewish day schools in New York City the 1840s and 1850s solely to changes in the comparative quality of public and private schools. In the forties, he argues, the quality of public education was poor. The schools were run on the monitorial system and classes were quite large. Private schools by contrast offered the opportunity for smaller classes and a more personalized educational experience. Jewish day schools flourished.[46]

By the late fifties, the situation was reversed. Discipline at the private schools had become lax. The public schools had eliminated the monitorial system and had developed superior facilities and equipment. And a new dimension was added: The newly-formed Free Academy (later to become the City College of New York) decided to admit only graduates of the public school system. The Jewish day schools soon closed.[47]

A similar situation prevailed in Chicago a decade later. The Jewish day school closed in 1869, and efforts to revive it failed. The chairman of the school board recounted the reasons that the school could not be revived:

> Suffice it to say that after your school closed (in 1869) there were in my estimation two causes which worked against its reinauguration. The one was a want of a proper school room in a proper or central locality, the other reason - and perhaps no less weighty one - that the parents now in general prefer to send their children to the public school in order to afford them all the chances for advancement into high school to finish their Education. . . .[48]

At the same time the failure of the Jewish day school in Detroit was attributed to the fact that "no such results were achieved as those which the public schools secured."[49]

During the decade of the 1850s, however, debates raged on the relative educational merits of public schools and private Jewish day schools. Journalist Isidore Bush advocated public schools:

> I. because the public schools are better than our schools possibly can be; (particularly in smaller communities).
> II. Because public schools are more convenient, near to every family, while our schools (particularly in large cities) must be at inconvenient distances for the majority of the children.[50]

He also noted that public "school houses that are models of architecture, built for this purpose with all possible regard for the health and comfort of their children" while Jewish schools are "narrow, badly ventilated rooms."[51]

Wise, however, argued in favor of Jewish schools during this period because he believed them to be educationally superior to the public schools. "Can the trustees of the public school show us pupils of twelve years of age," he wrote, "who can read and write grammatically in three languages, and are acquainted with all branches of primary education? In the Lodge Street [Jewish Day] School they

can find plenty of them."[52] On another occasion he reported that the superintendent of the Cincinnati Board of Education had visited the Jewish day school and reported "that it surpassed the instruction given in the public schools of the city."[53]

These issues were of considerable concern to Jewish parents. In discussing the Jewish day schools, Gartner reports that "they advertised in the press the variety and excellence of their secular studies, which were said to include French, German, piano and embroidery. Only perfunctory mention was given to Jewish studies . . ."[54] It seems that the quality and variety of the secular educational program was of paramount concern to parents.

Judge Alfonso Taft, in a dissenting opinion in the Cincinnati Bible reading case, recognized the Jewish concern for quality education and placed it in the context of society at large. He wrote,

> The truth of the matter undoubtedly is, that the Jews, like many others, have found out that our common schools are munificently endowed, and, in general, well conducted, so that the privilege of attending them is inestimable, and they have wisely concluded to secure for their children the secular education of the common schools, and attend to their religious nurture at home and in their own organizations.[55]

The perceived quality of the public schools and the superior resources that were available to them clearly influenced Jewish decisions to support public education. The Jewish view remained consistent in seeking out the finest education available, whether in a private school or in a public school. The specific factors which led Jews to believe that the public schools were superior is unclear, but it is likely that just as other subgroups within American society (with the notable exception of Catholics) were coming to believe in the common schools, so too were America's Jews. Once the public schools were largely secularized and had developed high educational

standards, Jews were willing to take advantage of the educational advancement and social integration they offered.

The issue of Jewish education. While not completely absent from the public school-private school debates of the 1850s and 1860s, issues of Jewish education did not play a central role. For centuries, Jews had focused on Jewish education and had taken quite seriously the Biblical injunction, repeated in the daily liturgy, to "teach [Judaism] faithfully to your children." With the European Enlightenment and the opening of universities to Jews, the world of secular study opened to them as never before. For many of the German Jews who migrated to America, the concern for secular education far outweighed the concern for Jewish education, both as a practical avenue to advancement in America and as entree to a life of culture.

Thus as Jews entered into the debates about appropriate forms of education for Jewish children, concerns that children receive adequate training for Jewish life were secondary. Some discussion revolved around the need for rabbis trained in America to serve the needs of future generations of American Jews. Many, including Wise, saw Jewish day schools as laying the foundation for an American rabbinical seminary. But for most Jews, Sunday schools could provide adequate preparation for adult Jewish life. Virtually every Jewish congregation opened a Sunday School or Sabbath School during this period, and many of the day schools were converted into Sunday schools when they ceased providing full-time education.[56]

Among the Reformers, only Bernhard Felsenthal argued in favor of day schools on the grounds that they were necessary to provide intensive Jewish education. He advanced this argument only beginning in 1865, perhaps in an effort to appeal to Jewish leaders for the

preservation of day schools during their era of decline. His arguments focused entirely on the huge body of Jewish knowledge to be mastered and on the educational need for daily learning if this goal were to be met:

> We would be entirely against specifically Jewish schools, if the body of Jewish knowledge which we consider desirable for our children could easily be acquired in Sabbath schools. But there is too large an amount of subject matter to master. . . . One must review daily the subject matter of Jewish education, if it is to be paralleled by deeper teaching. Sabbath schools are [only] a command of necessity. Yes, Jewish day schools! Or many more day schools, in which the pupils will also have the opportunity acquire for themselves the desirable Jewish learning.[57]

Yet it is clear that his arguments fell on deaf ears. Day schools continued to decline despite his call for intensive Jewish education. When Felsenthal suggested to a meeting of his rabbinic colleagues in 1869 that they consider a series of resolutions on education, including a call for Jewish day schools, his proposals were not even discussed. His position was rejected so wholeheartedly that when a committee was formed to deliberate on his motions and other educational matters, he was defeated in his bid for chairmanship of the committee.[58]

No arguments for Jewish education could compete with the allure of the public schools and the full participation in American life that they promised. The Jewish dream of full acceptance and full participation was finally within reach. The quality of the public schools decisively eclipsed the competition. The sectarianism, while never fully disappearing, diminished and became more tolerable as Jews became more firmly committed to a total secularization of public life. And the public schools' partially accommodated the German language

demands of German immigrants at just the time when Jewish interest in German was waning. No obstacles remained to a full and complete public school consensus, which had been assured from the beginning by the fervent Jewish desire to participate fully in a society that welcomed them.

Following the closing of the last Jewish day school in 1872, the public school consensus among Reform Jews remained unchallenged for nearly a century, although for other groups of Jews the public school-private school dilemma surfaced repeatedly. The Eastern European immigrants who arrived in America between 1881 and 1924 far outnumbered the German Jews, yet they established only a small handful of day schools and sent their children to public schools in overwhelming numbers. Following World War II and the European Holocaust, a full-fledged day school movement sprung up, and by 1964, over 300 Jewish day schools were in operation. Day schools were organized by orthodox groups and Hasidim, by secularists and Hebraists, by community coalitions and by Conservative Jews - in short by virtually every group within the Jewish community except for the Reform movement.

Throughout this period, Reform Judaism and Reform Jews remained steadfast in their total commitment to public education. They sent their children almost exclusively to public schools, and they opposed any effort to weaken the Separation of Church and State or to provide funds to parochial schools. When Orthodox Jews opened private schools, Reform Jews decried them, and even when Conservative Jews entered the day school arena, Reform Judaism remained aloof. The possibility of Reform Jews weakening their support for public schools by establishing private Jewish schools was considered "heresy" through

the latter part of the 19th century and well into the second half of the 20th century.[59] Yet, by the fall of 1970, the first two modern Reform day schools had opened their doors. Dramatic changes had begun to occur during the previous decade, both in public schools and in Reform Jewish thinking, that would eventually lead to the erosion of Reform Judaism's public school consensus.

1970: The Emergence of a New Consensus - Agreeing to Disagree

The public schools consensus among Reform Jews faced its most serious tests in the 20th century over the issue of the legitimacy of Reform Jewish day schools. The possibility of establishing a Reform Jewish day school was first raised in 1950 by Emanuel Gamoran, Reform Judaism's Director of Education. In a speech before a convention of Reform rabbis, he responded to the opening of a chain of day schools sponsored by Orthodox Jews by calling for a similar move by Reform Judaism:

> Surely there is no reason why day schools in America should be represented only by the non-Liberal elements on the American Jewish scene. Certainly there ought to be a place to which a Liberal Jew, lay or rabbinic, who wishes his child to get an intensive Jewish education may be able to send him without exposing him to indoctrination with an Orthodox ideology. . . . We must face the facts frankly and seek, under our own auspices and in certain favorable situations, to establish day schools for perhaps 10 per cent of our pupils that will meet our needs. There is no reason why such private day schools should not be able to hold their own with the best private day schools in the country, or why in addition to the general education which the children would receive, they should not also have an intensive Jewish education with a good Hebraic base, in which Jewish and general instruction would be so integrated that the personality developed would be a unified, intelligent, Liberal American Jew.[60]

Gamoran's suggestion that Reform Judaism embrace a system of private

schools, while ignored at the time, adumbrated the issues that were to arise in later discussions.

It was not until 1961 that serious discussion of Reform day schools was heard among Reform Jews. Rabbi Maurice Eisendrath, the President of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC), the lay congregational body of Reform Judaism, addressed the Board of Directors, focusing on the need to intensify Jewish education:

> We must make certain that there be far-reaching improvement in our still desultory attempts to pass on to future generations outside of Israel the knowledge of our Hebrew tongue. . . . We will, likewise, have at least to discuss the question of the Jewish Day School. There is increasing dissatisfaction with the few hours of instruction presently afforded in our congregational schools and, while the majority within our own movement may resist, for still a long time, any temptation to yield to the growing clamor for the day school, the trend to the parochial school is already making great inroads in the Conservative movement. Nevertheless, our answer cannot be exclusively a negative one; if not the day school then at least increased hours and days for the religious school must become our minimal standard. In speaking of the Day School . . . we shall most definitely continue our unequivocal stand against any form of federal aid to such religious or parochial schools. . . .[61]

Eisendrath's speech was soon followed by a petition signed by fifty students and faculty members of the New York branch of Hebrew Union College, the Reform seminary, calling on Reform Judaism's Commission on Jewish education to investigate the issue of Reform day schools:

> Recommending the Establishment of Liberal Jewish day schools - We, the undersigned, believe that the need for a more complete Jewish education, at present warrants our urgent attention. So too, we believe, it warrants the Commission's reconsideration and reevaluation of the establishment of Liberal Jewish Day Schools as one of the better possible solutions to that problem . . .[62]

The debate over private schooling now began in earnest. The issue of Reform day schools quickly moved center stage in the institutions of Reform Judaism. Over the next few years, debates were

held, articles published, and resolutions voted on. When the question of Reform Jewish day schools finally came to the national convention of Reform Judaism in the fall of 1969 the issues were well publicized and the Reform Jewish community was polarized. The resolution on which the delegates voted addressed the major concerns of Reform Jews: the need for more intensive Jewish education, the continued commitment to public education and to the separation of Church and State, the compatibility of day schools with American ideals and Reform principles, and the opposition to narrow parochialism. The resolution called for the establishment of "pilot programs and experimental projects in full-time Reform Jewish education."[63] The first vote on the resolution was inconclusive, but the resolution was narrowly defeated when the delegates were tallied again. Reform Jews were unwilling in 1969 to go on record taking any stand that would appear to compromise the public school consensus that had stood for a century.[64]

However, what the majority of delegates failed to recognize was that by 1969 the public school consensus was already crumbling. The mere discussion of Reform Judaism sanctioning the establishment of private schools was proof of the tenuous nature of the consensus. But in addition, the very resolution which the delegates, primarily laypeople, had defeated, had already been approved by the Commission on Jewish Education comprising lay and rabbinic educational leaders, and by the Central Conference of American Rabbis, the official organization of the American Reform rabbinate.[65]

More significantly, however, at the very time the national delegates were narrowly defeating the day school resolution, two Reform congregations were making plans to open congregation-sponsored

private schools. In early 1969, Congregation Rodeph Sholom in New York decided that "in fulfillment of the historic concern of the Jewish community with education in all its aspects, Congregation Rodeph Sholom envisages the establishment, at the earliest feasible moment, of a day school through the intermediate grades"[66] and later that year the board of directors of Temple Beth Am in Miami resolved, "Beth Am Kindergarten-Nursery be extended to include a lower Primary Block."[67] Both schools opened in the fall of 1970, thus becoming the first modern-day Reform day schools.

What had happened to the consensus that would have made a private school under Reform auspices an anathema? Had the values of Reform Jews changed so radically that private schools were now acceptable to them? Had the public schools suddenly become so unacceptable? Just as the emergence of the public school consensus in 1870 can be attributed to a complex matrix of factors, so too the reasons for its demise lay in the confluence of several factors, some involving public education and Reform Jews' perception of it, and others involving basic realignments of Reform Jewish thinking. First, private schools were undergoing a "democratization" in the eyes of Reform Jews. Second, the "de-coupling" of the public school-civil rights connection meant that it would be possible to continue the traditional Reform commitment to social justice and racial equality, to continue to express that commitment in many ways, and still to support the legitimacy of private schooling. And finally, parental concern for quality secular education and the devotion of the rabbinic leadership to high quality Jewish education converged to give added respectability to the idea of Reform Jewish day schools.

While the public school-private school dilemma expressed itself

in many ways in the years leading up to 1970 (and since), the issues and concerns of Reform Jewish leaders and their lay following frequently crystallized in the discussions over Reform day schools. The changes in Reform Jewish perceptions of public and private schooling can be traced through these debates.

The "democratization" of private schooling. During most of the century of consensus, Reform Jews saw private schooling as the domain of a privileged elite and of Catholics with their "parochial" interests, but eventually they came to see private schools as an acceptable alternative for all children.

In the 1920s when the issue of whether religious groups have a constitutional right to operate private schools was argued in the courts, Reform Judaism took no stand. No Reform reaction was recorded to the Supreme Court's sanctioning of private schools in Pierce vs. Society of Sisters . Reform silence on the issue of religiously-sponsored private schooling was finally broken, however, in a 1961 resolution stating,

> We respect the right of any religious denomination to establish and administer its own educational institutions. We applaud their contributions to the cultural and spiritual diversity of our nation, and we urge those religious groups which have parochial schools to continue to support them without passing this responsibility on to the government.[68]

By the early 1960s many Reform Jewish children were attending the elite private schools of the Northeast. Rabbi Jay Kaufman, one of the earliest Reform day school supporters, noted that the propriety of private schools for the economic and intellectual elite went unchallenged among Reform Jews.

> Anyone living in the Boston or New York areas knows that thousands of youngsters from Reform Jewish homes in these areas alone . . . attend private and not public schools. Who suggests that they pose a threat to the public schools? Where are the

> anguished cries from those who opposed Reform day schools concerning the removal from the public school system of those children of the wealthy and successful, of gifted youngsters whose parents seek a more demanding course of study for young intellects left unchallenged and but partially exercised by the public school class? There are none.[69]

Despite the recognition of the role of private schools in providing for the education of certain religious groups and for the elite, Jewish private schools still were viewed as a threat to public schools, which were seen by Jews as both the avenue to success and the chief exemplars of the equal status Jews had achieved in American society. When the debates over day schools began, it was natural that a chief argument against them was that the move to establish day schools "serves to seriously undermine our commitment to the integrity and quality of public education."[70] Opponents of day schools consistently pursued this line of reasoning and argued that support of private schooling was a threat to public education.

These arguments were countered with a denial that private school support would lead to the demise of public education. One of the earliest day school advocates, Rabbi Alexander Schindler, first the UAHC's Director of Education and later its President, told reporters for the New York Times that "he did not view the all-day Jewish schools as a threat to the public school system or a violation of the principle of separation of church and state."[71] Another early supporter of the day school adumbrated an argument that was to be reiterated over and over again:

> Those of us who advocate the Reform day school are avid proponents of a flourishing public school and would permit nothing to diminish this precious democratizing institution. The American Jewish child, with some exceptions, will attend the public school and we would not have it otherwise. Frenzied or repeated accusations that we seek to "undermine the public school" simply do not make it so.[72]

The resolution supported by many groups within Reform Judaism but ultimately rejected in 1969 acknowledged that public school support would remain a sine qua non of Reform Judaism:

> This encouragement of experimentation [with Reform day schools] does not in any way supplant part-time religious education which will continue to have the Commission [on Jewish Education]'s full and increasing support. The great majority of our children and youth will obviously continue to receive their Jewish education in part-time religious schools and [summer] camps. Further, the great majority of our children and youth will continue to receive their general education in public schools, to the preservation and encouragement of which American Reform Judaism has always been and will continue to be committed as the principal instrument of general education in the United States. . . . As we envisage it, full-time Jewish education and public education reinforce and strengthen each other.[73]

This position signalled a break from the either-or mentality that had developed in Reform Jewish circles by arguing that it was not inconsistent to support private schooling for some Reform Jewish children while still maintaining support for public education. The new ideology which this position represented was one in which private schooling was to be an option made available to those parents and children who wished to choose a private, full-time Jewish education; it was no longer to be only for the economically or intellectually advantaged. The full depth of this position is represented by the fact that one of the first two day schools committed itself to granting a full scholarship to a "negro child" in order that the school not appear elitist![74]

Combined with this democratization of private schooling in the eyes of Reform Jews was the de-parochialization of the Reform day school idea, a move from seeing day schools as parochial schools to portraying them primarily as private schools. Initially, both opponents and proponents of Reform day schools saw them as part of an undifferentiated system in which parochial and non-parochial schools

were lumped together. For example, a forceful opponent of day schools combined his opposition to private and parochial schools: "I am opposed to all private schools. I am opposed to all parochial schools. In a democratic society, I believe all children should attend public schools."[75] One of the earliest defenses of the day school idea compared Reform day schools to Catholic parochial schools:

> If the vast Catholic parochial school network and the sizeable, exclusive private school system have not undermined the American public school . . .how can one in truth harbor fears that a Reform day school system will have a significant or negative effect?[76]

Others, however, sought to break the connection; they sought to show that Jewish day schools were in essence not parochial schools but needed to be seen as private schools. The resolution set before the 1969 convention specifically stated that Reform Jews did "not propose developing a nationwide or regional system of 'parochial' schools. Parochialism as a system, as well as a philosophy, requires that education belong solely to an established church. Our position is radically different."[77]

The two day schools that opened in 1970 were decidedly against the narrowness implied by the term "parochial." Rabbi Baumgard of Miami explained how his views on the subject had changed over the years:

> Twenty years ago, I was completely against even a modified parochial school system for Reform Judaism. I was for universalism, togetherness, et al. I still am for these things, but I am not for the disappearance of Judaism. Accordingly, I am one of the many Rabbis who now feel that there must be some experimentation in the Reform "parochial" school. Of course, I am not for the kind of all-out institution that the Catholics or Fundamentalist Protestants sponsor. What I have proposed for Beth Am is a religious program which is one-sixth to one-fifth of the total curriculum for our experimental school, and this religious program is to emphasize "Judaism as the celebration of life," i.e., the joy of being a Jew.[78]

It is important to note here that Baumgard viewed his new school as one which was not narrowly concerned with Jewish interests. He was careful to distinguish his school from the type of parochial school with which his congregants were familiar. The emphasis on the joyous aspects of Judaism in a program of Jewish studies circumscribed to a very limited percentage of school time served to distinguish this school from other parochial schools in the minds of his congregants. Only by emphasizing these differences could he garner support among his Reform Jewish constituency.

Similarly, the Rodeph Sholom Day School in New York set out to be a private school serving primarily Jewish students rather than a parochial school. The school was initially viewed in explicitly universalistic terms.

> This day school is conceived as a service to education today and to the community, designed to develop character values and ethical ideals leading to responsible citizenship. It will be open to all pupils who can qualify for its academic requirements, regardless of faiths or origins, and will offer students courses of Jewish content, taught from the historical and scientific viewpoint.[79]

The school's curriculum was to be limited in terms of its Jewish religious content and was to concentrate on the "ethnic" components of Jewish life. According to its designers, "the new Day School would not be a parochial school. It will have Jewish content. American and Jewish holidays would be celebrated."[80] It's purpose was not to be a "Jewish day school" but rather a "private school for Jewish children."

The conceptual evolution was now complete. The way to make a Jewish day school acceptable to Reform Jews was to portray it as a private school, an institution which had become acceptable to a sizable portion of the Reform Jewish community. However, since

parochial schooling was still not acceptable to Reform Jews who clung to their universal ideals, day school advocates were careful to distinguish their private schools from the parochial institutions of other religious groups.

De-Coupling the public school-civil rights connection. From its beginning, Reform Judaism's universal ideals, its adaptiveness to America, and its longing for a Messianic Age of universal peace and harmony made social justice one of its chief concerns. Reform Judaism never shied away from taking stands on the important social issues of the day, and its leaders and lay people were in the forefront of progressive social movements throughout the past several generations. In particular, Reform Judaism and Reform Jews took an activist stance in the civil rights movements of the 1960s. Therefore, when the question of private schooling arose at precisely the time that schools in America's urban centers were in the throes of racial turmoil, it was natural that objections would be raised. The chief concern expressed was that to abandon the public schools at just the moment when they were suffering the stress of racial tensions was to retreat from Reform's social justice commitments. In a clear response to attempts to avoid integration orders following the Brown vs. Board of Education ruling, the UAHC stated unequivocally,

> We urge all congregations within our Union to withhold the use of their facilities in circumvention of judgments and orders of the Supreme Court and other federal courts, and to refrain from any course of conduct which would support instrumentalities of any state or private organizations seeking to frustrate the enforcement of such judgments and orders.[81]

The same year the UAHC defeated the day school resolution, it reiterated its commitment to social and economic justice for Black Americans:

> The current demands made by the American black community painfully remind us of the appalling hurt done by our nation to a long-oppressed multitude. Certainly we in the Reform Jewish community cannot allow our country to ignore the plight of America's impoverished millions. Jewish imperatives require that we be ever sensitive to the aspirations and just demands of our country's minorities.[82]

The controversy over racial issues was heightened because the two cities in which Reform day schools opened in 1970 were facing severe racial tensions focused on the schools. Miami faced court-ordered busing and frequent reports of racial violence in the schools, and New York was in the midst of what historian Diane Ravitch has called the "Fourth School War," one element of which was serious Black-Jewish tensions.[83] However, both the New York and Miami Reform Jewish congregations were clear in their intentions in establishing private schools. To Congregation Rodeph Sholom, located in the heart of Manhattan's Upper West Side, suburbanization of the Jewish community was seen as a threat both to the congregation and to the welfare of New York City. As early as 1961 the congregation's rabbi, Louis Newman, stated that a day school "would be of help . . . in persuading more families to remain the metropolitan area, instead of migrating to the suburbs."[84] The layperson most instrumental in the establishment of the school believed in "the distinct need for service to the community" and saw the day school as providing that service.[85] By keeping white Jewish families from deserting the city to avoid integration, these leaders saw the day school playing a beneficial role in improving race relations.

A parallel argument could not be made at Temple Beth Am in Miami, a temple situated in a suburban community with a large Jewish population. The temple's rabbi, Herbert Baumgard, was thus quite explicit in de-coupling social activism and public school support. He

argued that it was possible to remain committed to racial equality while advocating private Jewish schooling:

> There are some few people who have been concerned that our school, small as it is (it will be no larger than two classes), is an invitation for parents to withdraw their children from the public school in a time of crisis. I have been told in effect, 'Rabbi, how could you do such a thing? You have been so active in the field of social justice. You are Chairman of the Community Relations Board Task Force on Social Action. You organized the first interracial veterans organization in Virginia. You openly worked for the election of the first Negro to the Norfolk, Virginia City Council. . . . You have been on the Board of the Urban League. You are a life member of the NAACP. You have marched on the front lines of Negro demonstrations. How could you do this terrible thing of starting a school for Jewish children?" My answer to these well-meaning friends is this. I share your concern about the public school. Therefore I would not permit at Beth Am a large synagogue-school. But because I love the black man, I do not have to sit idly by while Judaism and the Jewish community evaporates. I shall not do less for the black man than I have always done. What the present seems to require for Jews is more intensive education.[86]

The legitimacy of such a position is not the issue here; what is important is that for a sizable portion of the Reform Jewish community a new belief was emerging. In the eyes of many, it was possible to retain a robust commitment to the universal social values of Reform without giving total, unqualified support to the public schools. With the de-coupling of civil rights activism and public school support, one of the key rationales for the exclusive public school consensus had evaporated.

The Search for Quality Education. The historic Jewish concern with education which expressed itself so prominently among 19th century American Reform Jews was no less powerful a force among their 20th century heirs. Concern with quality secular education remained the top priority for contemporary Reform Jews, just as it had been a century earlier, but the issue of quality Jewish education, which was tangential a hundred years earlier, became paramount in the minds of

many Reform Jewish leaders in the 1960s.

Reform Jewish parents of the 1960s were primarily 2nd and 3rd generation Americans; school children were 3rd and 4th generation. These young Jews were in no need of Americanization as were their predecessors 100 years earlier. The most crying need, according to many, was an intensification of Jewish education for this generation in order to overcome "the abysmal ignorance among Jewish children regarding Jewish history, archaeology, literature and life,"[87] to "roll back creeping assimilation,"[88] and to combat "the decreasing loyalty of American Jewish children to the Jewish group."[89] The opening line of the 1969 resolution stated bluntly, "No charge upon Reform Judaism is more compelling than the need to intensify Jewish education."[90] In looking back on the founding of the first several Reform day schools, the directors of those schools listed among the reasons for their establishment "The reestablishment of Jewish roots, lost through assimilation and lack of Jewish home environment. . . . A desire by parents for more intensive Judaic studies for their children. . . .A parental desire for Hebrew fluency for their children."[91] Many Reform Jews recognized that none of these were being accomplished satisfactorily in the existing Sunday schools and afternoon Hebrew schools.

Day school proponents recognized that the influences of American culture were so overwhelming in the lives of young Reform Jews that retaining their connections to Judaism was difficult. Rabbi Stanley Chyet, a professor at the Reform seminary, argued that since "Judaism is a way of life and of looking at the world, . . . it can be experienced only within the confines of a daily, ongoing exposure to Jewish concerns."[92] A full-time Jewish educational setting was

seen as the best answer to the problem of Jewish life in a secular society:

> If our children are incessantly exposed to specious values in their public schools and in society, then we should provide them with greater opportunities to confront and explore the values of primary importance in Jewish tradition. Removed from the dehumanizing value system of their secular culture, they may be able to accept Judaism as the dominant reality of their lives. . . . One way to assure the survival of Judaism in a secular society may be the creation of day schools within the Reform movement.[93]

A particular emphasis of those who saw private Jewish schooling as the answer to the need for more intensive Jewish education was the need to train future leaders for Reform Judaism. Rabbis were among the main proponents of day schools and they based their support of day schools on the notion that more intensive Jewish education was needed to produce Reform leaders,[94] and in particular that the Reform day school would make it possible to stop "'import[ing' scholars] from other branches of Judaism [i.e. Orthodox and Conservative]."[95] The Reform day school would produce "leaders who vocationally or avocationally will guide our movement not by instinct and honest groping but from knowledge and clearly etched aspirations."[96] Even one of the most vociferous opponents of Reform day schools acknowledged that "the whole rationale for the Reform all-day school, therefore, adds up to only one positive argument: it is needed in order to develop a Jewishly-enriched Reform leadership."[97] His solution to the problem of Jewish education was to improve the existing educational structures. Day schools, he argued, were not of interest to most Reform Jews; they were being proposed by a very small elite group. "An attempt is being made," he argued, "to thrust all-day schools upon a Reform constituency which in the main is not in sympathy with them."[98]

There is no question, however, that the overwhelming majority of the Reform constituency was in sympathy with the idea that they should seek out the finest secular education possible for their children. In the early 1960s, there were still those who argued that quality education was available only in the public schools:

> With more limited time and facilities at their disposal the quality of general education offered in all-day schools is bound to suffer as the pace of the present-day public school's program advances. . . . It is most unlikely, therefore, that even the best Jewish all-day school - and there are many at present whose secular education is less than satisfactory - can hope to provide the facilities and instruction, especially in the sciences, that will measure up to the new programs in the public schools.[99]

But as early as 1963, there emerged a sense that "America's system of public education [was] not fulfilling either the needs of individuals or of the nation as a whole."[100] Throughout the 1960s this opinion became more prevalent in Reform Jewish circles. A survey of Reform rabbis taken in 1968 indicated that much of the interest in Reform Jewish day schools could be explained by the "need for better educational facilities."[101]

Discussions of the desirability of opening a private school at Temple Beth Am in Miami were sparked by "parents who have children in public school and are not satisfied with the public school" - neither its educational program nor its social climate.[102] When the school was announced, its primary purpose was to be "quality education and religious education."[103] And chief among the reasons directors of the first few Reform day school gave for the founding of their schools was "as a response to deteriorating public education."[104]

The perception of the decline in the quality of public education was a potent force in the erosion of the public school consensus among

American Reform Jews. Whether this would have been enough in and of itself to dissolve the consensus of public school support among Reform Jews is unclear. Perhaps as the quality of education continued to decline through the 1960s, Reform Jews would have found private schooling an increasingly acceptable option even without other changes in Reform Jewish thinking. But the democratization of private schooling in the eyes of Reform Jews accompanied by the de-coupling of the public school-civil rights connection set the stage for the demise of the public school consensus.

Since 1970, as the perceived quality of public education has continued to decline, more Reform Jewish day schools have opened. Today there are approximately a dozen schools which operate with the official sanction of Reform Judaism. They serve upwards of 2000 students, an admittedly small proportion of Reform Jewish children, but countless thousands of others attend other private schools. What the future will bring is, of course, uncertain. In the unlikely event that the perception of the quality of public schools improves dramatically and the other problems in public education appear to be resolved, Reform Jews may return to public schools and reestablish their consensus supporting public education. Or, having experienced the advantages of private education, they may remain divided with some children attending public schools, others private schools. But without dramatic improvement in public education, the return of Reform Jews to public education is highly unlikely in this generation. In that case it may be even harder to re-establish the public school consensus in the future than it was to achieve it initially in the 1800s.

NOTES

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3. See "Private Elementary and Secondary Education, 1983: Enrollment, Teachers and Schools," National Center For Education Statistics Bulletin , December 1984.

4. See Cooper, op cit .

5. See Alvin Schiff, The Jewish Day School in America , New York: Jewish Education Committee Press, 1966, and Judah Pilch, ed., A History of Jewish Education in the United States , New York: American Association for Jewish Education, 1969.

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7. Lloyd Gartner, Jewish Education in the United States: A Documentary History , New York: Teachers College Press, 1969, p. 86.

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9. ibid , p. 179.

10. ibid , pp. 178-179.

11. See, for example, Thomas Hunt and Norlene Kunkel, "Catholic Schools: The Nation's Largest Alternative School System" in Religious Schooling in America edited by James Carper and Thomas Hunt, Birmingham: Religious Education Press, 1984, and Robert Cross, "Origins of the Catholic Parochial Schools in America," in American Benedictine Review , vol. 16, 1965, pp. 194-209.

12. Cross, op cit , p. 195.

13. Occident , IX, 9 (December 1851), p. 476, quoted in Lloyd Gartner, "Temples of Liberty Unpolluted: American Jews and Public Schools, 1840-1874" in Bicentennial Festschrift for Jacob Rader Marcus

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14. The Jewish Times , II, 22 (July 29, 1870), p. 346, quoted in "Temples," p. 177.

15. Israelite , I, 22 (December 8, 1854), p. 174, quoted in "Temples," p. 171.

16. Asmonean (October 22, 1852), p. 272, quoted in James Bleiberg, "The Debate Over Day School Education in Reform Judaism: A Historical Study," Unpublished Thesis, Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College, 1982 (hereinafter Bleiberg), p. 8.

17. Israelite , I, 24 (December 22, 1854), p. 189, quoted in "Temples," p. 171.

18. Gartner, Documentary History , p. 71.

19. Israelite , II, 18 (November 9, 1855), p. 148, quoted in Bleiberg, p. 14.

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22. See "Temples."

23. See "Temples," p. 167.

24. Gartner, Documentary History , p. 64.

25. See "Temples," p. 168.

26. Floyd Fierman, "The Jews and the Problem of Church and State in America Prior to 1881," in Educational Forum , March 1951, p. 336.

27. See Grinstein, op cit , and Fierman, Sources .

28. See Grinstein, op cit , and Fierman, Sources .

29. Morris Schappes, A Documentary History of Jews in the United States, 1654-1875 , New York: Citadel Press, 1952, p. 529.

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35. ibid , p. 184.

36. ibid .

37. Isaac Fein, The Making of an American Jewish Community: The History of Baltimore Jewry from 1773 to 1920 , Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1971, p. 70.

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39. See Fierman, Sources .

40. Gartner, Documentary History , p. 64.

41. See Fierman, Sources .

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43. See Leonard Swichkow and Lloyd Gartner, The History of the Jews of Milwaukee , Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1963.

44. See Fein, op cit .

45. Die Deborah , XIV (June 4, 1869), p. 190, quoted in Bleiberg, p. 20.

46. See Grinstein, op cit .

47. ibid .

48. Fierman, Sources , p. 188.

49. Quoted in "Temples," p. 166.

50. Israelite , I, 22 (December 8, 1854), p. 174, quoted in "Temples," p. 171.

51. Israelite , I, 24 (December 22, 1854), p. 189, quoted in Bleiberg, p. 11.

52. Israelite , I, 22 (December 8, 1954), p. 158, quoted in Bleiberg, p. 10.

53. Israelite , III, 30 (January 20, 1857), p. 238, quoted in Bleiberg, p. 14.

54. Gartner, "Temples," p. 165.

55. Schappes, op cit , p. 531.

56. See, for example, Heller, op cit . See also Fierman, Sources , op cit .

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